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ABSTRACT

This book looks at gifted and talented students from a "national resource" point of view. The first chapter establishes the basic premise that gifted and talented children represent a significant resource to any nation and that it is profitable to the nation to invest in their development and education. Subsequent chapters describe types of giftedness, characteristics of gifted youth, underidentified gifted populations (and techniques for identifying them), and the role of adults in fostering giftedness and providing needed opportunities. One chapter is devoted to the special case of gifted females. One chapter addresses nine categories of options available for enhancing the educational experiences of gifted students and explains how these options can be modified and combined to meet the needs of a specific school district and its gifted students. A chapter on "follow-up" studies of gifted and talented students suggests certain commonalities in personal qualities among the "successful" gifted and talented as well as the kinds of activities that appear to promote achievement and maintain a positive self-concept. (Contains approximately 230 references.) (DB)

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WHY GIVE "GIFTS" TO THE GIFTED?

investing in a national resource

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LITA LINZER SCHWARTZ

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Preface

The word "gift" has varying meanings according to the context in which it is used. The perfume given to a mother on Mother's Day is one kind of gift; a large sum of money given to a legislator by a lobbyist is another kind of gift; and the ability to create an inspiring piece of music is yet another type of gift. The motive underlying each of these gifts differs from love to bribery to inherent need for self-expression. We also give gifts to show our appreciation for someone's thoughtfulness, to enable a traveler to carry a memento of us while away, or to share in the joy of a bride and groom establishing a new life together. Our society deplores the bribery of legislators, but applauds the rest of these gifts.

The gifts of creativity, leadership, and the ability to manipulate words or numbers, however, are less concrete than packages in fancy paper with ribbons and may not be apparent until a "product" of some sort results. These gifts are *within* the individual and, like the seed of a plant, need advantageous conditions—nurturing—to develop, mature, and flower.

In what ways do we identify whose gifts we wish to encourage? Most often, the gifted are identified by intelligence test scores, but these are not and should not be the sole criteria used. For one thing, the abilities needed to succeed at a level markedly above average on tests and in the schoolroom form the basis of only one kind of gift. For another, too many individuals who are potentially able to succeed equally well are not so identified for a variety of reasons—lack of test-taking skills, test anxiety, lack of opportunity, or discouragement.

Many available texts deal with education of the gifted and talented, but I know of none that focuses on the "national resource" aspect of this population. Rather than describing a specific program

for gifted and talented youth or providing strategies for teaching them, this book is aimed primarily at those who decide educational policy and which aspects of such policy will have financial support as well as administrative commitment.

The initial chapter establishes the basic premise that gifted and talented children represent a significant resource to any nation and it is profitable to the nation in many ways to invest in their healthy development and their education. Such an investment extends equal educational opportunity to them, just as legislation and public funding have provided such opportunity to other exceptional children.

Subsequent chapters describe types of giftedness, characteristics of gifted youth, underidentified gifted populations (and techniques for identifying them), and the role of adults in fostering giftedness and providing needed opportunities. One chapter is devoted to the special case of gifted females, because they have barriers to overcome that are typically not experienced by gifted, or even nongifted, boys, and parents and professionals alike should be aware of these problems. Of particular importance to decisionmakers is the chapter on options available for enhancing the educational experiences of gifted students, some of which cost virtually nothing and others of which may fly in the face of current practices. Nine categories of options and how these options can be modified and combined to meet the needs of a specific school district and its gifted students are included. A chapter on "follow-up" studies of gifted and talented students suggests certain commonalities in personal qualities among the "successful" gifted and talented as well as the kinds of activities that appear to promote achievement and maintain a positive self-concept. The concluding chapter ties these varied threads together and reaffirms the initial premise. The list of references is somewhat longer than it might ordinarily be so that readers can more quickly find sources that interest them.

All of this is basic but essential information for school board trustees, administrators, and legislators as they contemplate the long-term effects of their policy decisions.

Although the book is not a "how to" text for teachers of the gifted, it can also provide them with ideas and resources. As a thought-provoking book, it would thus be an appropriate supplemental text for college and university courses on education of the gifted and educational policy.

Acknowledgments

This book, like some others I've written, is the culmination of years of thought and experience. It owes a great deal to the encouragement I had from my late parents and from my brother, and to many teachers who were female models of competence. My young adult sons, Arthur, Joshua, and Frederic, can also take credit for opening my eyes to different kinds of gifts and talents and for helping me to develop some of my own in nonacademic areas.

There have been colleagues through the years, too, who have taught me much about the gifted and talented—in workshops, in conversation, and through their writings. Each of them has contributed, often unknowingly, to my thinking about the gifted and creative. Judy Featherman, a dear friend with her own expertise in the education of exceptional children, has shared both her knowledge and her editing ability as this book was being written.

Gracia A. Alkema, President of Corwin Press, has become a friend as well as publisher, and her prompt support of the ideas presented here was both welcome and a source of encouragement to push forward with their development.

Finally, for more than 15 years, I was given the freedom to explore in many directions and the opportunity to develop programs for the gifted and others at Penn State Ogontz by present and former Campus Executive Officers and Directors of Academic Affairs, as well as occasional funding support by The Pennsylvania State University for research studies. The staff of the Library at Penn State Ogontz have my greatest gratitude for all of the cooperation they have provided for so many years.

With the encouragement, teaching, and support of so many people, is it any wonder that there has been so much to mull over?

About the Author

Lita Linzer Schwartz is Distinguished Professor of Educational Psychology and Professor of Women's Studies at Penn State's Ogontz Campus outside Philadelphia. A graduate of Vassar College, Temple University, and Bryn Mawr College, her dissertation focused on curiosity, anxiety, and intelligence in fifth graders. Her own curiosity has maintained interest in those and related areas, particularly emphasizing giftedness and creativity in females.

Schwartz has written texts for courses in Foundations of Education, Educational Psychology, and Education of Exceptional Children, as well as co-authoring a book on immigrant children and U.S. schools during the great immigration period of 1880-1920. In addition, she is co-author on a book on cults and conversion, co-author of a book on divorce, and most recently, author of the book *Alternatives to Infertility*. She has written articles or chapters in each of these areas, with special emphasis in recent years on legal and psychological ramifications of child custody contests arising from adoption and divorce. She is also a Fellow in the Divisions of Psychology and Law (41) and Family Psychology (43) in the American Psychological Association and holds a Diplomate in Forensic Psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP).

Although her interests may appear to be sharply diverse, she finds considerable overlap among them, as ultimately they all have an effect on children's self-image and behaviors. One of her principal concerns is that adults too often develop policies and practices that affect children without considering their long-term implications.